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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

THE peoples with whom this book is concerned, the Nyakyusa and the Ngonde, occupy an area shut in by mountains at the northern end of Lake Nyasa, and enjoy a culture which, though varying locally, clearly springs from a common basis and is traditionally attributed to similar origins. The most conspicuous features of their political organization are (i) the balance of power between chiefs and commoners; (ii) the 'coming out' ritual in which a generation of men which has governed for approximately thirty years retires and hands over the administration to its sons, retaining only ritual functions; and (iii) the system of age-villages.

All are agreed that chiefs and commoners belong to different stocks; the commoners being descended from the original occupants of the country while the chiefs trace their descent to a line of invaders who came down from the Livingstone mountains eight generations ago. According to the myth, they brought with them fire, and cattle, and iron tools, and they found a people who ate their food raw in a land 'without trees'.[1] Commoners are *abatitu*, black people, while Ngulube, an early ancestor of the chiefs, was 'pale'[2] and chiefs (*abanya(pale)* generally are said to have been lighter in colour and 'different in their bodies'. After generations of intermarriage between chiefs and commoners there is no consistent difference in physical type between them, but the range of physical type among the Nyakyusa as a whole is wide.[3]

Nyakyusa and Ngonde historians say that their chiefs are related to those of the Kinga, who live high above the Nyakyusa valley to the east in the Livingstone mountains, whence the chiefs came. The Kinga acknowledge the connexion and join with the Nyakyusa in sacrifice to their common heroes, but culturally the

[1] Possibly the lake-shore plain. The hills until cultivated are covered with either savannah or rain forest.

[2] Godfrey Wilson, *The Constitution of Ngonde*, Rhodes-Livingstone Papers No. 3, p. 10 (1939). According to the Ngonde version Ngulube was the *first* ancestor.

[3] cf. F. Fülleborn, *Beiträge zur physischen Anthropologie der Nord-Nyassaländer* (1906). *Das Deutsche Nyassa- und Ruwuma-Gebiet Atlas* (1906).

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and Tutsi who established conquest states to the north-west.[1]

Whatever the origin and adventures of the heroes they were important in Nyakyusa and Ngonde history because their graves became centres of religious ritual which linked together groups that were otherwise largely independent. The myths about them are the charter for chieftainship. They are depicted as benefactors who brought to uncivilized men not only the institution of chieftainship itself, but fire, cattle, iron, seed, and a creative power resident in their own bodies and those of their anointed heirs. But the myths also justify the power of commoners who first occupied the country and who have witchcraft in their bellies:

> The commoners whom Lwembe found here were extraordinary. They were cultivators, but they had not yet got fire, they ate their food raw. It was we chiefs, it was Lwembe, who brought fire and cattle—he came and found the original occupants without cattle; hence the commoners say, 'We are the earth'. Commoners are different from us physically, they are black; they are awe-inspiring, they are witches. Before you Europeans came the chiefs like Mwaipopo (116) were not awe-inspiring, they feared the commoners very much; the commoners hammered the chief with their fists—yes, by daylight. And if the chief cut a man's bananas that man took the chief's. If the commoners were angry with Mwaipopo they fetched Mwangomo (124 whose chiefdom adjoins Mwaipopo's) at night by their witchcraft; he came in the night with his people and seized the cattle, both those of the chief, Mwaipopo, and those of the commoners. The next day the commoners said: 'It is we, we are angry. Why do you not look after us? Why do you not kill cattle for us?' Then Mwaipopo would kill two head of cattle and all the men in the country ate. . . . Mwaipopo and his equals were not awe-inspiring long ago, it is you Europeans who have created chieftainship and awe.

[1] cf. H. H. Curson and R. W. Thornton, 'A Contribution to the Study of African Native Cattle', *Onderstepoort Journal of Veterinary Science and Animal Industry*, vii, 2 October 1936 (Government Printer, Pretoria). An analysis of the distribution and migration of breeds in Africa.

H. B. Thompson and R. Scott, *Uganda* (1933), pp. 135 ff.

Fülleborn, *op. cit.*, pl. 68: 69.

M. Merker, *Die Masai*, pp. 157 ff., 1904, Berlin.

H. H. Johnston, *The Uganda Protectorate*, 1904, pp. 86, 103 (early photographs of Nyoro cattle).

The short-horn type predominates among the Nyakyusa, but some animals suggest an intermixture with Sanga cattle. The hump is regarded as a great delicacy and is exaggerated in the clay cattle which boys model. Cf. Fülleborn, *op. cit.*, pl. 70. The similarity between the ritual and symbolism of the Nyakyusa and those of the Ganda as described by Roscoe is marked. J. Roscoe, *The Baganda*, 1911.

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CHAPTER III

THE 'DIVINE KINGS'

(a) CHARACTERISTICS OF 'DIVINE KINGS'

THE heroic myths and genealogies proclaim the origin of chieftainship, and point to a distinction between ordinary chiefs and those we call 'divine kings'. Two remote ancestors who were pre-eminent are worshipped as heroes and creators, their graves are centres at which a large number of chiefdoms join in celebration, and living representatives are selected in every generation bearing their names. These are the 'divine kings', the Lwembe of Lubaga (in the centre of Nyakyusa country) and the Kyungu of Mbande near Karonga in Nyasaland. A third hero, Kyala, is associated with the cave, PaliKyala, near Ikombe at the north-east corner of the Lake, and he is worshipped in the same way as the other two, except that the priest of the cave is not his descendant and does not embody him. According to the myth, Kyala was the brother of Lwembe, but died without issue. However, the word for chiefs—*abo-mo-fyala*—is popularly believed to mean 'the sons of Kyala'.[1]

Kyala is one hero among others, but his name is *also* used in the sense of 'the lord': a chief is *kyala gwake* (his lord) to a commoner, a father is *kyala gwake* to his son or daughter 'because he created him' and a shade is *kyala* to his living kinsman (*ungyaka ju kyala*). Of one who performs a feat—something difficult—it is said 'he is Kyala'.[2] This usage is said to be very old, but there is yet another meaning of the word which is new. *Kyala* was used by the European missionaries (who first established themselves near PaliKyala) as their translation of 'God'. Today these three conceptions are inextricably mixed: Kyala the hero, Kyala 'the

[1] I am indebted to the Reverend Paul Pastor for drawing my attention to this point. It is doubtful whether *Kyala* and *fyala* in fact come from the same root. *Fyala* in Hehe means the daughter of a chief (A. G. O. Hodgson, 'Some Notes on the Wahehe of Mahenge District', *J.R.A.I.*, lvi (1926), p. 40). In Bena *nyalyawo* means 'my husband's father or mother' (A. T. and G. M. Culwick, *Ubena of the Rivers*, p. 156). In Ganda *nalyala* means 'lady', mistress of a household and garden (J. Roscoe, *The Baganda*, p. 44). cf. Hehe, *fyala* 'to forget, to leave' (J. L. Krapf and J. Rebmann, *A Nyika-English Dictionary*, edited by T. H. Spurrell, 1887).

[2] cf. F. R. Lehmann, 'Some field notes on the Nyakyusa', *Anthropos*, New Series, 1931, vol. 5, p. 68.

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rulers were not of the royal blood but 'nobles' (*amakambwa*), descendants of the five leading men who had arrived with the Kyungu, of those he found already occupying the country, and of those who arrived after him. Later the slaughter of the Kyungu's sons ceased, and as they grew up they were established as subordinate chiefs through his territories, gradually taking over power from the commoners who had previously ruled, by a process familiar in other parts of Africa.[1] But the 'nobles' retained considerable power. At Lubaga the descendants of the two men who had arrived with the first Lwembe, and of some of those who were there before him, became priests, and priests only; in Ngonde those of similar origin developed secular, as well as ritual, functions.

The reasons why the office of Kyungu developed into a paramount chieftainship, and that of the Lwembe did not, have been examined in a previous publication,[2] and may therefore be dealt with very briefly here. The most important factor was that the Kyungu exported ivory and amassed wealth which was used to bind territorial rulers to him, while the Lwembe remained cut off from the outside world and did not trade at all. The geographical situation largely accounts for this. The ivory of Ngonde first went north, and later south-east, across the Lake, and Mbande was well situated for both routes. It lies eight miles from the Lake and close to a defile which leads from the lake-shore plain to an open table-land stretching north to Lake Tanganyika, the very route which engineers later selected for the Stevenson road. Lubaga, on the other hand, is forty miles from the Lake and the only routes northward lay over broken country and passes 8,000 feet high. Giraud remarks in his journal that the Nyakyusa were the only people he had come across among whom the chiefs did not claim at least one tusk of every elephant killed;[3] they did not claim it, for they had no use for the ivory; but the Kyungu's right to a tusk from every elephant killed was enforced.

The growth of a paramount chieftainship in Ngonde was slow. The early Kyungus lived within an enclosure on Mbande to which only their personal servants and the nobles of Ngonde had

[1] *cf.* M. Hunter, *Reaction to Conquest*, p. 380; H. Kuper, *An African Aristocracy*, pp. 13-14; I. Schapera, in *African Political Systems* (edited Fortes and Evans-Pritchard), pp. 60-1.

[2] Godfrey Wilson, *The Constitution of Ngonde*, Rhodes-Livingstone Papers No. 3 (1939).

[3] V. Giraud, *Les Lacs d'Afrique Equatoriale* (1890), p. 186.

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Kyala has no living representative—in the myth he had no descendants—but only a priest. However, the priest is sometimes referred to as 'Kyala' as were the early missionaries who preached about Kyala.[1] The present priest (1936) is a young man who, by his own account, would be a Christian were it not for his public responsibility in providing food for the country. His grandfather, Mwakinyasa, was a Kisi who came as an immigrant doctor from Ikubajila in Kisi country to the south, and was the first of his family to hold office at PaliKyala. Before that the chiefs of the line of Mwampasa themselves celebrated the ritual. According to Mwampasa's descendant, the present chief Mwandula, 'We planted food and the crops failed, but when "the owner of food" (Mwakinyasa) came with many medicines it grew, there was much food in the homesteads, hence we said: "Kyala has indeed loved this man, let us give him the duty of sacrificing", so the chiefs gave him cattle of his own and said: "Let the ritual come out of our bodies and go to Mwakinyasa."' It was Mwakinyasa who (according to his grandson) introduced a variety of crops—beans, maize, cowpeas and groundnuts—to the people of Ikombe; before that they grew only bananas and *mapemba*,[2] so the myth of the hero who brought benefits is linked to the new line of priests. But there is no tradition that the priest of Mwampasa's line was once a 'divine king' like the Lwembe and the Kyungu.

Those who sacrifice at PaliKyala are the local chiefs (descendants of Mwampasa), the Kinga chiefs Mwakalukwa and Kyelela (to whom Mwampasa was related), and various chiefs of the Nyakyusa plain as far west as Mwandisi (107) near Mwaya. The Kinga priests bring bamboo beer, hoes, sheep, and occasionally goats or cattle; the local people offer white fowls, flour, cattle, and, traditionally, pots, which are produced in quantity near by, and which were being sold at the market at Ikombe when the Europeans first arrived in the country.[3] The Nyakyusa of the plain send black (or black and white) cattle and sheep. According to the Kinga priests they themselves offer black animals in Bu-Kinga when they want rain—black clouds—and white animals when they want sun and a clear sky. At Lubaga only dark animals are offered, but at PaliKyala white fowls and black, or white (or

[1] F. Fülleborn, *Das Deutsche Njassa- und Ruwuma-Gebiet*, p. 317.

[2] *Mapemba*—maize in Penja, but here it is contrasted with *filumba* (maize).

[3] Joseph Thomson, *To the Central African Lakes and Back* (1881), v. I, pp. 260-3. The missionary, Dr. A. Merensky, saw hatchets and choppers, as well as pots, on the floor of the cave. F. Fülleborn, *op. cit.*, p. 320.

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future boundary between the two halves of the chiefdom, where it will split the next generation. They serve as beacons[1] and are cited as evidence both of the 'coming out' and of the division of land in any later dispute. At the same time the trees are symbols of chieftainship and with their growth the success of the reign is mystically linked. According to one account, 'four headmen fetch the cuttings and the young chief stands between them (*vide plate* 6) and tells the trees to grow well, and the others say: "We are planting you likewise, we are at the ritual of establishing a new chieftainship, you are a symbol for our chief, spread branches that our young headmen and other people may rest in your shade."' A doctor assists at the planting, burying at the roots a live white sheep and medicines, which, it is said, later turn into the lions or leopards which protect the trees from the impious (*vide infra*, p. 58); and he sweeps beneath the trees, a symbol of what the senior headman must do in future, for it is his duty to 'watch over the trees'. In Nyakyusa thought, village headmen are an integral part of chieftainship—it cannot exist without them—and the trees symbolize *both* the chief and his lady and the two senior headmen. The same informant (well known as a doctor for the 'coming out') told us: 'It means we are planting the chief and his lady; *umpandapanda* is the herd to herd *indola*, which is the more important. *Umpandapanda* is the woman, it may dry up, but *ulupando* (*indola*) never does; it is the chief, it is familiars (*ulupege*). but *umpandapanda* is not', and a moment or two later, 'the *ulupando* is the senior village headman, *umpandapanda* is the junior headman'. The strength of the chief is associated with the growth of the trees. If these trees go dry the reign will not be successful, the chief will be defeated in war. If they flourish and grow the reign will be successful, the chief is a ruler. The *indola* planted for Mwaijonga (82) is shown proudly by his great-grandson, and Mwambete (162) who had a long reign and an enormous family boasted of the size of his *umpandapanda*—'a great spreading tree'. Ideally the young chief should, in due course, sit in the shade of his *indola* with his headmen, to settle disputes.

After the trees are planted the young men build their senior headman's house and the doctor sets up his hearth bricks, burying medicine beneath them also. The marriage of the chief follows.[2]

[1] cf. D. Kerr-Cross, 'Greater Lakes north of Lake Nyasa', *The Geographical Journal*, v, IV (1895), p. 117.

[2] According to most accounts, but *vide infra*, p. 56.

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system is still the accepted form in Mwaipopo's chiefdom; the advantages of separating kinsmen in different villages are explicitly stated, and the contrast between the Nyakyusa and their neighbours in this respect emphasized. 'Certainly we do not live with kinsmen here but the Kinga do.' 'It is not good for a son to live close to his father, they will quarrel.' 'When we move to another village we consider friendship not kinship in selecting it.'

(*b*) THE BALANCE BETWEEN GENERATIONS AND SECTIONS

The ritual cycle of the 'coming out' and the sacrifices in the groves helped to maintain a balance of power between generations, as well as between chiefs and commoners. At the 'coming out' of Mwanyilu (177) in 1953 it was Mwabuputa, the senior village headman of his father, who took the leading part. He was described as 'the greatest man in the country' who 'brings out the chief' and his manner indicated that he was well aware of his power. During the reign of Mwaipopo (116) the power of his father's village headmen, Njobakosa and Ngulyo, was apparent at every ritual. Spiritual power was shared between chiefs and commoners, but exercised ideally by a virile chief of the ruling generation and the experienced headmen of the retired generation.

Those chosen as senior village headmen at the 'coming out' are commonly older than the young chief, but village headmen are thought of as surviving their chief—it is they who were responsible for smothering him, and performing the sacrifices in his grove. The headmanship is an *office* and so long as the office is necessary an incumbent is found for it, in the person of the heir of the original holder who is so closely identified with the deceased that most precise inquiry is often necessary to establish whether a given individual is the original holder, the succeeding heir, or a later heir, successor to the successor. The Ngulyo who officiated at the rituals in 1935 was the heir of the original Ngulyo (some said the *grandson*, not the son) and he was criticized by Kasitile as being 'a young man who knew nothing'. The principle, so familiar in Central Africa, of a perpetual office[1] emerges, among the

[1] I. Cunnison, *Kinship and Local Organization on the Luapula*, Communications of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute No. 5 (1950), pp. 14-15; J. C. Mitchell, *The Yao Village*, Manchester (1956), p. 102; A. I. Richards, *Land, Labour and Diet in Northern Rhodesia*, O.U.P. (1939), p. 94; 'Some Types of Family Structure among the Central Bantu', in *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, p. 224; J. Roscoe, *The Baganda*, London (1911), p. 3.

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There is no single supreme power; it lies in the several heroes, in medicines, in witches, and with the shades. Kyala is a hero, a forefather, to whom sacrifices are made, and he is comparable to Lwembe and Kyungu, though he left no direct descendants. The evidence suggests that the names Kyala, Lwembe or Mbasi, Kyungu, and Ngulube were used in the same way in different areas, Kyala being the hero of the north-east shore of the Lake, Kyungu of the north-west, Lwembe of the central Nyakyusa valley, and Ngulube of the scarp edge of the Livingstones. Sometimes informants used Lwembe and Kyala alternatively saying they meant the same thing, although, as we have noted, Lwembe (or Mbasi) was specially associated with cattle, whereas Kyala, who was killed and rose again, only controlled crops, and may perhaps be taken as personifying vegetation. The distinction is in no sense clear-cut, but there is a hint of a cultivating people having been defeated by cattle-keepers with iron weapons, since Kyala was finally killed with a 'razor' (*ulwembe*), and The Razor himself —Lwembe—could not be killed though men tried.

In their creative aspect the heroes and shades are closely identified: 'Kyala creates desire'; 'the shade rouses up in the belly when a woman conceives'; 'Kyala and the shades stand together'. Kasitile said:

> Lwembe . . . makes a child. I lie with a woman; Lwembe is there, he works. Sometimes, if he is angry he works badly and a leg is missing, or the woman has a miscarriage. Sometimes he works well. Lwembe goes about looking upon the mothers; he is in my bellows (i.e. in my wife). It is he who came from BuKinga . . . and wished first to build at Nsamba's (i.e. where Nsamba go now lives). He failed there and went to Kasambala's and failed there and he seized Lubaga. All is his. A child is his and a cow, and the iron which the Kinga make is his, and food is his. . . . He is in a bull and a man. Where do you get the 'blood' (to beget a child)? Are you alone? . . . No, the Kukwe do not know Lwembe, but the people of the plain do, they are one with us.
> QUESTION: And Kyala?
> KASITILE: He is there, Kyala and Lwembe are together among us and the people of the plain. It is Lwembe who creates twins. You do not. Who has made your body? Who has created you? Who has given you strength and breath so that you are born, and live, and grow up, and marry? It is Lwembe and Kyala together.[1]

[1] cf. J. Buwe, 'Die Zwillingsgeburt bei den Nyakyusa', *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, 73. Jahrgang, pp. 194ff.; 'Aus dem Leben von Asyukile Malango', *Zeitschrift für Eingeborenen-Sprachen*, Band xxiv (1934), p. 202.

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4. The safety valve of labour migration should not be closed and young Nyakyusa should be encouraged to go away to work whilst wages abroad are relatively high.
5. Finally, with a view to the future as well as the present, it is suggested that an individual's land-holding should be at his own disposal, and, if desired, by money sale. Purchasers should, at first anyway, be limited to members of the village where the holding lies or to men willing to settle there.

These recommendations are to be taken only as a suggested programme for administrative consideration. No attempt can be made here to lay down the details of future policy, for that is the function and responsibility of administrators and technical officers, African and European, and not of the Sociologist.

The Sociologist could, however, with profit participate in the discussions and work preparatory to the development of a satisfactory programme. It is essential that a complete programme be arranged and executed to tackle all or most of the problems concerning the land, economics and agriculture. Tinkering with different aspects here and there is likely to be unfruitful and is unlikely to command the propaganda and drive of a comprehensive scheme. Such a planned scheme should be able to catch the imagination and support of the people themselves, especially if they and their leaders can be brought to see the reasons for it and the value it may bring.

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gram. This last-mentioned type is used by the Batutsi of western Tanganyika as temporary shelter on their perennial wanderings.

Why, then, do not all tribes build to the same design? There are 120 different tribes in Tanganyika alone, and were you to put the question to a member of one of these tribes, he would simply say, "We follow our custom!"—and this is actually the answer. It takes time to be influenced; people will stick to their old customs,—a fact which, as seen from an ethnographical point of view, is really an advantage. Changes should not come too quickly.

At about the time when Johannsen wrote the above lines, the history of Johannesburg as a town had just begun. Now that city is all grey stone colossi and streets criss-crossing at right angles. Even if the gold was behind all that, you never know when a similar fate may befall some part of Tanganyika. What cannot be called forth by the diamonds to the south of Lake Victoria?

Were the African village to disappear entirely,—it would truly be missed. It is interesting to follow the development which is under way in Tanganyika, and which cannot be halted,—to see how it will influence the charming villages and their inhabitants.

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535 [832] These dances seemed to be a representation of "sex appeal" or courting. Each new phase of the dance was introduced by the advancing of one or two young women fairly near to the side of the men, then each retreated followed by the whole lines of both the sexes. If the youngest girls present who stood mostly behind the "dancing" line (i. e. the group of the advancing women and older girls) were to come too near the proper dancing place, they were driven back. The older people and the *amafumu* were only spectators.

535 292 The women had no special dancing dress, but the men did. They now wore mostly a sort of tight jackets or sweaters and wide robes, coloured or with patterns.

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Synopsis

000 Verfasser legt seine Ermittlungen vor, die er während seines dreimonatigen Aufenthalts im Dorfe der Masoko (die zu den Nyakyusa gehören sammelte. Sie geben einen Einblick in die damals, 1939, überwiegend traditionsgebundene Lebensweise dieses Stammes, namentlich bezüglich der Medizinmänner und der Behandlung der Kranken. Um im Falle der Schwester des Häuptlings die Ursache der Erkrankung zu ermitteln, wurde ein Wahrsager gerufen, der bei einer Sitzung den Ehemann als Urheber feststellte. Zur Heilung wurden vom Häuptling Zeremonien am Grabe von dessen Vater angeordnet. Außerdem beschreibt Verfasser aus eigener Erfahrung die Trauerzeremonie nach dem Tode eines Kindes, die Initiation eines verlobten Mädchens u. a.

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the figures. Also bicycles, aeroplanes, motor-cars and other striking objects of the European civilization are to be found represented and concentric white circles adjacent to these drawings or paintings.

14. Houses. Sometimes the upper portion of the framework of the rectangular houses is not fully plastered with mud leaving broad open areas or strips horizontally or slopingly to the base-line. This may have its origin in an artistic motive and at the same time be useful in ventilating the interior of the hut. The ancient custom of the Nyakyusa to fill out the spaces between the framework of the walls with flat, oval cakes or clods of clay, supported inside the house by a second framework of bamboo *(uvumango)*, has also a decorative effect.

The preparation of those oval sun-dried clay cakes is the work of the women. L. Monteith Fotheringham described this in his "Adventures in Nyasaland" (London 1891, p. 22) with the following words: "The women make the bricks in shape like large eggs by pressing the clay between their hands." The building of the framework of the hut and the thatching of the roof is the task of the men. Nyumba means "the house" in Kinyakyusa as wellas in Swahili; *isyenga* is the name for the old-fashioned hut of the Nyakyusa possessing a round baseline and a framework expanding upwards in diameter. The rectangular hut is called *ikibaga* and the smaller rectangular hut used as a store or a fowl pen, *akabaga*. It is interesting to note that there is no special word for roof in Kinyakyusa. This part of the hut or house is simply called "the above" *(iyuru)*. In contrast to this fact the different poles of the roof-structure are specially named according to their position parallel to or at right angels to the ridge of the rectangular houses. *Ukutalike* means to bind the different rafters of the roof together; *imbanda* is the name for the supporting poles of the roof, and *isyengo* for the poles of the framework of the walls.

15. Outfit. Inside the house we find besides the bedsteads *(ikitara,* pl. *ifitara)* and the household utensils, the grinding-mill *(urusuara)*, consisting of an upper (smaller) and a lower (broader) stone. The flour falls into a basket placed in front of the mill. Sometimes in a corner of the hut a nest *(ikitero)* for a sitting hen on top of a pole is to be found. Outside the house is a place for the sweepings *(urutagililo)*. The cleaning of the interior of the houses and also the repairing of the mud plaster is the task of the women, but I saw men cleaning the space in front of the huts. At any case, it must be acknowledged that the cleanliness of a Nyakyusa village leaves little to be desired.